

Docket ID FEMA-2008-0017

**Voluntary Private Sector Accreditation and Certification Preparedness Program
Response of United Way of Southwestern Indiana**

January 23rd, 2009

United Way of Southwestern Indiana would like to thank FEMA for the opportunity to respond to its proposals regarding the Voluntary Private Sector Accreditation and Certification Preparedness Program.

United Way of Southwestern Indiana 2-1-1 has been a 2-1-1 since 2005 and serves Vanderburgh, Warrick, Spencer, Posey and Gibson counties. Each year, we answer over 20,000 calls. We are a member of the IN211 Partnership and AIRS. Our center is AIRS Accredited and all of our Community Resource Specialists are CIRS or CRS certified. We fully support and encourage other Centers to apply and earn their AIRS accreditation.

In 2008, the state of Indiana had numerous disasters including three federally declared disasters. FEMA and the State relied on 2-1-1 Centers to help victims during these disasters. While 911 and emergency responders were dealing with rescues and evacuations, 2-1-1 connected affected families with sandbags, water, food, emergency shelter, as well as donors and volunteers. After the initial flurry of attention to disaster, 2-1-1 continues to help families and communities recover.

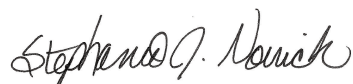
Locally, our 2-1-1 center was designated by the City of Evansville as the one call source for disaster assistance for victims of the November 2005 tornado, which struck Vanderburgh and Warrick Counties. This F3 tornado claimed the lives of 25 people. Our 2-1-1 went into action and provided information to victims, as well as to people wishing to donate money, time or household goods. We helped form the Long-Term Recovery Committee to assist with unmet needs of the victims. The Long-Term Committee continues to meet every six month so we are ready to respond to the next disaster.

Our community's response to the tornado garnered national praise. Brad Gair, a coordinating officer for the FEMA said, "I don't think I've ever seen a community of people come out so quickly to help each other. All communities come together after a disaster, but this one is exceptional."

As a 2-1-1 service, we strongly believe in the need for national standards to secure consistency and quality. Within our sector, the AIRS Standards for Professional Information and Referral have been long recognized as the foundation of I&R service delivery. And within those standards, there is a specific section on disaster preparedness that continues to enhance our ability to respond before, during and after disasters. AIRS has submitted its own proposal which includes the latest copy of those Standards.

We urge FEMA to adopt the disaster preparedness section of the AIRS Standards as the voluntary disaster standard for the I&R/2-1-1 sector and to recognize the existing AIRS Accreditation Commission as the entity to certify compliance with those standards.

Sincerely,



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